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DISTINCT STATUS CHANGES OF CERTAIN PALAEARCTIC MIGRANTS IN THE SUDAN

A large number of Palearctic species visit the Sudan on passage or during the northern winter and a few oversummer. While most of these originate from eastern Europe and Asia, there are some of which the whole Eurasian breeding population visits the country.

Comparing the records before 1955 (Butler 1905, 1908, Bowen 1926, 1931, Cave & Macdonald 1955) with those after that year (A. Pettet in litt., G. Nikolaus from 1976 to 1983 pers. obs) it is clear that drastic changes have taken place in the status of some species, which form the subject of this note.

Waldrapp *Geronticus eremita*

Cave & Macdonald (1955) state that the Waldrapp (or Bald Ibis) is "Rare although recorded as occurring in flocks of several hundreds", while Bowen (1926) also states it to be "common on the coast - resident" even though breeding has never been mentioned for this region. There are at least five skins in the Khartoum Natural History Museum (KNHM) from the Red Sea coast for years before 1940.

After 1955 there is only one sight record (GN, pers. obs.) of a single bird on presumed spring passage on 18 March 1983 near Suakin (19.05N, 37.20E). This decline in numbers conforms with the recent reduction in the known eastern Mediterranean breeding population (Brown et al. 1982, Cramp & Simmons 1977), from which birds recorded in the Sudan are likely to have come.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Bowen (1926) and Cave & Macdonald (1955) regarded this species as a common

non-breeding visitor to the Nile north of Khartoum between October and March. Most observers before 1955 report it as regular in small numbers in the north-eastern part of the Sudan during winter, even south to about Tendelti (13.01N, 31.52E). There are no post-1955 records. Brown et al. (1982) record its decline as a breeding species in many regions of the Palaearctic although it is interesting to note that it has been found breeding in Ethiopia in 1975 and 1976 (Ash 1977).

Egyptian Vulture Neophron percnopterus

This species has a major breeding population in northern Sudan and it is not known to what extent the numbers are augmented by Palaearctic visitors.

It is still locally very common, especially along the Red Sea coast from late September to spring. But in some places, such as Khartoum (15.35N, 32.30E) and Wad Medani (14.23N, 33.32E), where numbers up to a few thousands were reported in the past, the Egyptian Vulture is now a rare bird. Around Khartoum all other species of vulture have totally disappeared. The reasons for these changes are not clear, but the biggest numbers are probably victims of the electric powerlines, where they are killed when they touch the wires while roosting on the poles (Nikolaus, G. 1984: *Scopus* 8: 42).

Another reason for the decline could be the very intensive use of pesticides and herbicides around Khartoum and in Gesira Province, while quite a number are regularly killed along the new Khartoum - Wad Medani - Port Sudan road. However, since this road is only a few years old it cannot be a major reason for the decline of the population.

Sociable Plover Vanellus gregarius

It has always been only a rare winter visitor to northern Sudan and is less common than the White-tailed Plover *V. leucurus*, which is more tied to aquatic habitats than the Sociable Plover, even though both are represented by 12 skins in the KNHM. The most recent Sociable Plovers to have been collected in the Sudan were in 1950, and there are no records since.

We cannot explain the change of status of this species; it would be useful to know if there has been a similar decline in northern Ethiopia. In Somalia there is only one old record from the north of the country (Ash & Miskell (1983)).

Black-headed Gull Larus ridibundus

In contrast to all the other species mentioned in this note, the Black-headed Gull became much more common in recent years. In winter up to 3000 were counted at the Jebel Aulia dam (15.15N, 32.28E) and large numbers are seen regularly elsewhere along the Nile, south to Lake No (9.30N, 30.30E). Further south, and away from the Nile, only single birds, mainly in immature plumage, occur. Britton (1980) records a similar increase from Kenya and Tanzania. In the past in the Sudan Cave & Macdonald (1955) and Bowen (1926) gave the status of the Black-headed Gull as an uncommon non-breeding visitor.

The status change is probably related to the strong increase in its European breeding population, but since there are still no ringing recoveries, the precise origin of Sudan birds is unknown.

Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis

This species is known for its sporadic occurrence in Africa in winter. Around 1920 it was reported in Dongola Province (c. 19.20N, 30.30E) in such numbers that major control campaigns were necessary to ensure no disruption in agriculture (King 1921). Nearly 50 skins in the KNHM were collected by H.H. King in 1920/21 at the Letti Basin (18.22N, 30.47E). Elsewhere in the north Sudan records were few. Cave & Macdonald (1955) noted that it is a "Very common non-breeding visitor, October to March, in the old Dongola Province" while

Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) stated (for the northern Sudan) that it appeared to be extending its range, but this has not been borne out by observations since their book was written: there are no recent records of mass occurrence and only very small numbers winter uncommonly south of the Sahara.

The reasons for the change in status are not known and it is not clear whether, in fact, the species occurred in large numbers only in a few years.

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FURTHER NOTES ON BIRDS NEW OR LITTLE KNOWN IN THE SUDAN

During six years (1977-1983) of intensive study of birds in the Sudan, a number of birds were added to the country's avifauna (Nikolaus 1979a, b, 1981, 1982a, b). The final results of this work will be given in a distributional atlas for the country (using a 1-degree square mapping system) with notes on habitat and status (Nikolaus in prep.).

In the species list which follows, additions to the Sudan list are marked with an asterisk.

White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

The rare occurrence in the extreme north is documented by Bowen (1926): a specimen was collected in December 1920 at Morghani Island, Dongola (c. 19.20N, 30.30E). No other records have been traced until the winter of 1982-83 when one was caught alive by local people near the Kashim el Girba dam/Atbara River (14.55N, 35.55E) in December 1982. A further 12 birds were seen near Port Sudan (19.37N, 37.12E) on 24 December 1982 by St. Paterson (in litt.).

*Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*

In the Khartoum Natural History Museum is a mounted specimen from Gogrial (8.32N, 28.05E), Bhar el Ghazal collected in 1956. Another recent sight rec-